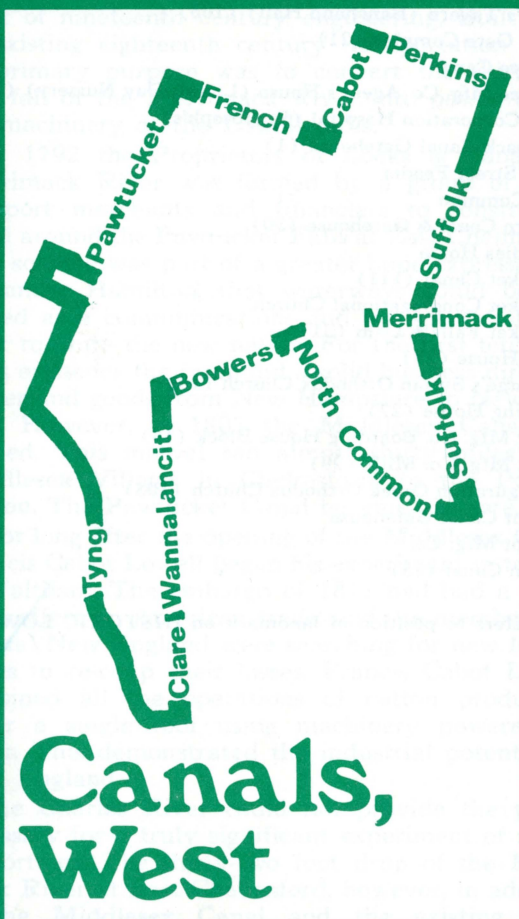


Walking Tours of LOWELL



LANDMARKS

Ayer Mansion (Franco-American School) (29)
Clare Street (20)
Coburn's Tavern (Banchand Hall) (105)
Francis Gate Complex (21)
Lawrence Canal
Lawrence Mfg. Co. Agent's House (Lowell Day Nursery) (13)
Lowell Corporation Hospital (St. Joseph's)
Merrimack Canal Gatehouse (1)
Moody Street Feeder
North Common
Northern Canal & Gatehouse (30)
Old Ladies Home
Pawtucket Canal (111)
Pawtucket Congregational Church
Pawtucket Falls & Dam (31)
Round House (28)
St. George's Syrian Orthodox Church (104)
Spaulding House (27)
Suffolk Mfg. Co. Boarding House Block (14)
Suffolk Mfg. Co. Mills (99)
Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church (103)
Tremont Canal Gatehouse
Tremont Mfg. Co.
Western Canal (15)

(—) refers to position of landmark on HISTORIC LOWELL map.

The Mills and Canals

Western Tour

"The Green Tour"

Begin this tour at the *Merrimack Canal Gatehouse* (1). Because the Locks & Canals system is so vast (5.5 miles of canals) this tour will concentrate only on the Western end of the system.

The *Merrimack Gatehouse* was built as a part of the Northern Canal project of 1847-1848. Its three sluice gates control the flow of water from the *Moody Street Feeder*, an underground canal, originating at the Western and Northern Canals.

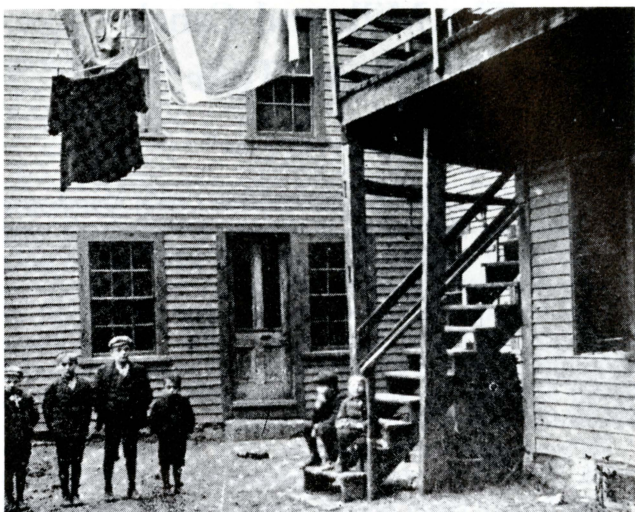
As you leave the Gatehouse, turn right onto Merrimack Street and proceed towards Suffolk Street.

The Lowell canal system is an amazing accomplishment of nineteenth century engineering. Built upon an existing eighteenth century transportation canal, its primary purpose was to convert the thirty-two foot fall of the Merrimack River into power to run the machinery of the Lowell mills.

In 1792 the Proprietors of Locks & Canals on Merrimack River was formed by a group of Newburyport merchants and financiers to construct a canal around the Pawtucket Falls at East Chelmsford. This scheme was part of a greater hope expressed by Alexander Hamilton, that waterways could be employed as a communications and transportation network to unite the new nation. For the first ten years of its existence the canal did a solid business directing timber and goods from New Hampshire to Newburyport. However, in 1803 the Middlesex Canal was opened. This marvel ran almost thirty miles from Middlesex Village, in Chelmsford, to the Port of Boston. The Pawtucket Canal became obsolete.

Not long after the opening of the Middlesex Canal, Francis Cabot Lowell began his experiment in textiles at Waltham. The embargo of 1812 had had a disastrous effect on American trade, and the merchants of Coastal New England were searching for new investments to re-coup their losses. Francis Cabot Lowell combined all the operations of cotton production under a single roof using machinery powered by water. This demonstrated the industrial potential of New England.

The Charles River could not provide the power necessary for a truly significant experiment of major proportions. The thirty-two foot drop of the Merrimack River at East Chelmsford, however, in addition to the Middlesex Canal and the existing near-abandoned Pawtucket Canal, provided a perfect setting for the series of events that would revolutionize American society, business, and technology.



"Little Canada" 1912 City of Lowell

This area, through which you are now walking, was known, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as "Little Canada", the center of Lowell's French Canadian community. Substantial numbers of French Canadians arrived here during the 1860's and, like the Irish before them, were hired for the most menial tasks.

The French community established eight churches of three denominations, a hospital (St. Joseph's), a college and numerous civic, social, and cultural institutions. *L'Etoile*, Lowell's French daily newspaper, ceased publication in 1957. This community has produced countless civic and professional leaders. One well known Lowellian of French descent is the "beat-generation" novelist, Jack Kerouac.

Continuing on Merrimack Street, turn right onto Suffolk Street. On your left is the *Western Canal*. Built in 1832, its water powered the Suffolk, Tremont, and Lawrence Mills. It is a mile in length.

Proceed along the canal and turn right at *St. Patrick's Church* (18). Walk through the churchyard and cross Adams Street. Continue through to the North Common.

The site of the *North Common* was purchased by the city in 1845 during the great Locks & Canals land sale. The North and the South Commons were the City's first attempts at providing badly needed open space. This Common was recently reconstructed as a part of Lowell's Model Cities Program.

Turn right and walk along the perimeter of the North Common to the *Transfiguration Greek Orthodox Church* (103). During the 1920's the Greek community of Lowell was divided over political and religious issues. Some of the original members of the Holy Trinity congregation separated and established

a new parish on this site. This church was constructed in the 1950's to house the newer congregation.

Turn left onto Clark Street and proceed to Fletcher Street.

On the corner of Fletcher and Clark Streets, is the Lafayette Club, a French social organization. This building was originally built by the City in the 1870's as a fire engine house.

Turn right and continue on Fletcher Street. At the corner of Fletcher and Bower Streets is the Romanesque-styled *St. George's Syrian Orthodox Church* (104). It was originally built as the French Congregational Church.

To the rear of the church, on Fletcher Street, is the *Old Ladies Home*, built in 1888. It was designed in the Queen Anne style by the Lowell architect Otis Merrill.

Turn left onto Bowers Street, a primarily middle class neighborhood of 1840 through 1870 homes.

Cross School Street and continue onto West Bowers Street (on your left). At the corner of West Bowers and Wannalancit Street, to your right, is the *Round House* (28), a private residence.

The Round House was completed in 1872 by "Gentleman Johnnie" Bowers, a carriage maker and proprietor of the Willow Dale Amusement Park. This unusual Second Empire residence cost a reputed \$30,000 and is graced by a central circular staircase. Atop the staircase is a cupola with Haley's Comet painted on its ceiling. Using the finest materials, he finished the interior with mahogany woodwork, and Italian marble fireplace mantels. The rooms reflect the round plan of the house. The third floor is a ballroom.

Adjacent to it, and across the street, are two beautiful shingle style houses of the 1890's. On the right is a Colonial Revival house of 1906.

Turn left onto Wannalancit Street and walk towards the Bartlett School.

On your left, atop the hill, #98 Wannalancit Street was the home of Otis Merrill, the architect for City Hall and other prominent Lowell structures. It is a simple Second Empire cottage.

At the Bartlett School turn right and then left onto *Clare Street* (20). Clare Street is chiefly single and two-family cottage homes of the 1890's built for the lower middle class.

Turn right onto Broadway.

On your right, as you cross the bridge, is the *Francis Gate Complex* (21) on the *Pawtucket Canal*. This is the first set of navigation locks on the canal. They were built originally in 1792 and rebuilt later in the nineteenth century.

The early canal was not without its problems as a local historian noted:

The first boat passed through in 1797 . . . This being the first canal that was built in this country, hundreds of both sexes and of all ages stood around and upon the first lock; and as soon as the boat, containing the directors and invited gentlemen, had entered the lock its sides suddenly gave way. Spectators and voyagers both were submerged and were carried with great violence down the stream . . .

The brick Romanesque structure was built in 1870 and houses five sluice gates which regulate the flow of water into the canal.



Northern Canal and Walkway c. 1870

Lowell Historical Society

The most famous structure at this site however, is the *Francis Gate*, known for many years as “Francis’ Folly”. James Bicheno Francis, Chief Engineer of the Locks and Canals, made a study of the historical water levels of the Merrimack River. He determined that a serious flood was possible. Such a flood, raging through the canal system, would destroy the central city. Between 1848 and 1850 he designed and built this guard gate which would effectively seal off the canal system from the flood waters. Local people laughed at such foolishness and referred to it as “Francis’ Folly”. However, in 1852, a spring freshet

swelled the Merrimack River to dangerous proportions; this gate was lowered and the city was saved. It was lowered again in 1936 during an even higher flood and helped minimize the damage.

Turn right onto Tyng Street and continue alongside the canal to Pawtucket Street. On your left is the Pilling Shoe Mill, now elderly housing.

The Pawtucket Canal originally had four sets of navigation locks. In 1822 Kirk Boott, using Irish laborers, widened and deepened the original channel and removed one set of locks. This was to provide necessary "head" of water to operate the water-wheels.

Turn right onto Pawtucket Street.

Further along on your left, is the *Spaulding House* (27), built about 1760 by Robert Hildreth.

Before the Pawtucket Canal was built, loggers were forced to transport their timber around the Pawtucket Falls, on land, by ox-cart. For some time Moses Davis maintained a tavern here to serve those loggers. In 1777, Captain John Ford, a Revolutionary War hero bought the house. In 1790 Ford sold it to Joel Spaulding, another Revolutionary War veteran. His son, Joel, an eminent Lowell physician participated in the "underground railroad" by opening his home as a refuge for runaway slaves. The house is now owned and maintained by the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution and is open to the public.

Turn left onto School Street.

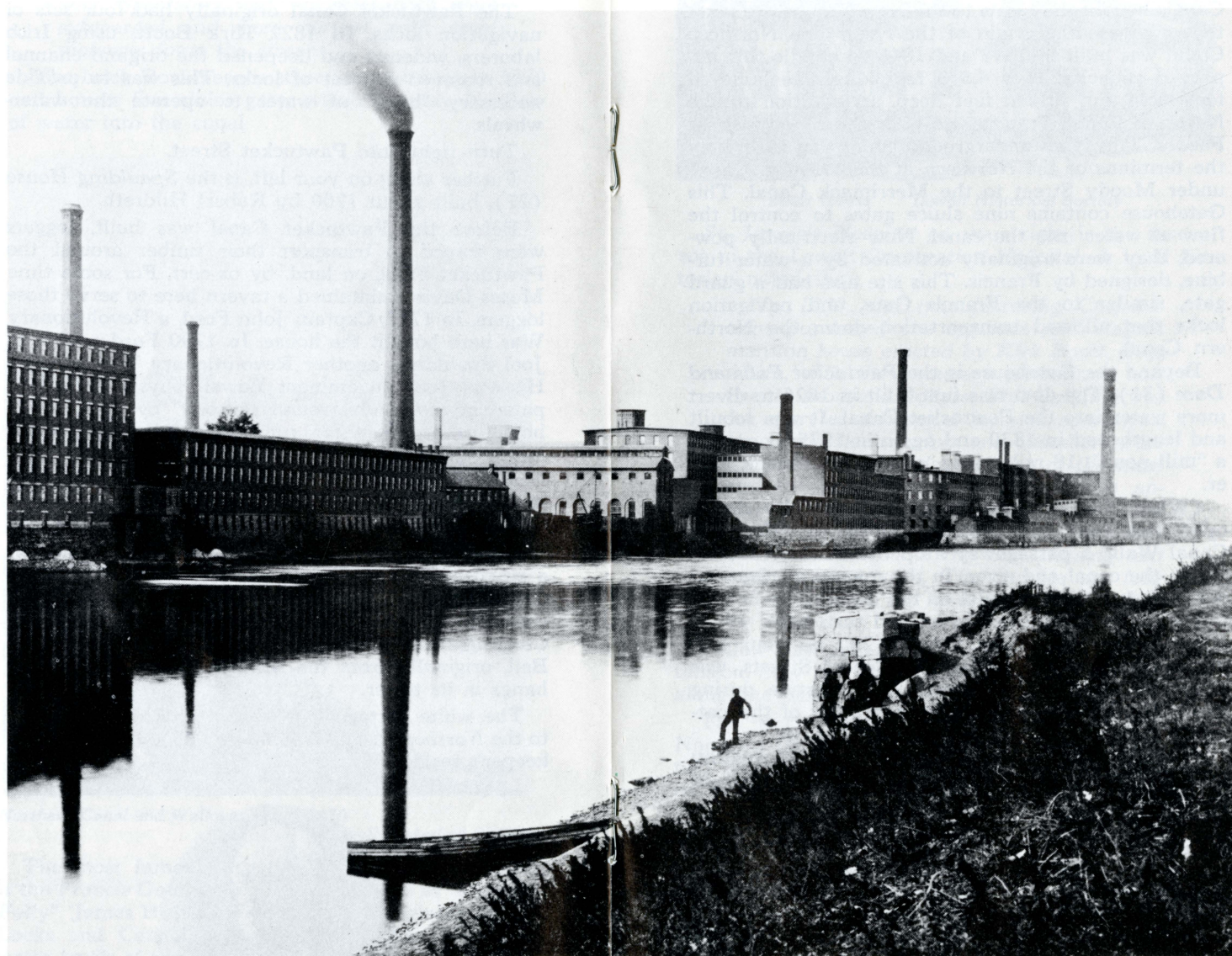
Before the development of Lowell, Falls Village, a small cluster of houses, was located here, in East Chelmsford, at the only existing bridge. Across the river, in what was then Dracut, is the *Pawtucket Congregational Church*, organized in 1790. A Revere Bell, originally from the Middlesex Village Church, hangs in its tower.

The white cottage (1848) on your left, adjacent to the *Northern Canal Gatehouse* (30), was the Gate-keeper's residence.



James B. Francis

Lowell Historical Society



Mile of Mills c. 1900 Lowell Historical Society

By the 1840's, companies on the end of the canal system were complaining of inadequate power to run their machinery. To correct this, James B. Francis designed and built the *Northern Canal*. This massive canal brought water directly to the end of the canal system to power six millyards. In order to regulate the current of the Merrimack River, Locks & Canals bought the rights to the New Hampshire lakes that compose the origin of the river. The Northern Canal was built in 1847 and 1848 to handle this improved capacity. It is 4,373 feet long, one hundred feet wide and fifteen feet deep. In addition to the Northern Canal, Francis also built the Moody Street Feeder. This is an underground canal that runs from the terminus of the Northern at the Western Canal, under Moody Street to the Merrimack Canal. This Gatehouse contains nine sluice gates to control the flow of water into the canal. Now electrically powered, they were originally activated by a water turbine, designed by Francis. This site also had a guard gate, similar to the Francis Gate, and navigation locks that allowed transportation down the Northern Canal.

Beyond the Gatehouse is the *Pawtucket Falls and Dam* (31). The dam was first built in 1826 to divert more water into the Pawtucket Canal. It was rebuilt and lengthened in 1830 and again in 1875. It creates a "mill pond", 18 miles long, on the Merrimack River.

(When the Heritage State Park is fully developed this tour will continue along the Northern Canal Walk, a passageway atop the Great Wall, between the canal and river. In the meantime, the tour will follow a path parallel to the canal).

Return to Pawtucket Street and turn left.

The *Franco-American School* (29) on your left, at the corner of Pawtucket and School Streets, was originally built in the Second Empire style during the 1870's by Frederick F. Ayer, brother of the patent medicine manufacturer, James C. Ayer.

Pawtucket Street was a neighborhood of wealthy self-made men, whose ambitions were reflected in their homes.

Bachand Hall, at the foot of Fletcher Street, was originally built in 1824 by Phineas Fletcher and known at *Coburn's Tavern* later called *Stone House Hotel* (105). Lowell's first town meeting was held here in 1826. The hotel was a popular resort for Bostonians and was known for its wide verandas with their panoramic views of the river. The annual "Lighting Up" Ball was held here in September when it was necessary to light the lamps in the mills. The "Blowing Out" Ball was held in March when the lamps were extinguished. In 1850 James C. Ayer converted the house for his private residence. In 1876 his wife established the "Ayer Home for Young Women and Children" here.



Boott House Lowell Historical Society

St. Joseph's Hospital on your right is the successor to the Lowell Corporation Hospital. A local historian noted that:

"In 1839, the manufacturing Corporations purchased the spacious and elegant mansion house erected by Kirk Boott, Esq., which, with the necessary alterations, cost twenty thousand dollars. This building was set apart as a hospital for sick operatives. Its commodious parlors and chambers were converted into wards, and one of the most eminent practitioners in Lowell was appointed its physician . . . All persons in the employ of the Corporations, who are taken sick, can here have the best nursing and medical attendance. The charges are four dollars a week for men, and three dollars for women.

Follow Pawtucket Street to the French Street Extension. Stay on the left hand sidewalk and continue along the canal bank.

The water flowed into the newly constructed Northern Canal by blowing up the Coffey Dam with two barrels of Oliver Whipple's Best Powder. Daniel Webster exclaimed upon seeing the new canal: "The stupendous works of Almighty God are so well adapted to the wants of men."

Lowell was often referred to as the "Venice of America" and this was illustrated at no better point than here, where shabby tenements crowded one another upon the walls of this canal. The Board of Health noted:

There are others so near on the side of a neighboring building, that a person cannot pass between; where the eaves overlap, and the rooms are dark at 3 P.M. One of the newest buildings in "Little Canada", a huge three story, flat roof caravansary, 206 x 44 feet, has a population of 396 persons. Every

tenement in this building (four rooms, usually, except the end ones) has two dark rooms, lighted by high, small windows in the kitchen only; . . .

On the right at the corner of French and Cabot Streets, is a *Suffolk Manufacturing Company Boarding House Block* (1845) (14). The boarding houses were built close to the mills because of the long hours that the operatives worked and more importantly so that the company executives could keep watch on the "moral standing" of the workers.

Turn left onto Cabot Street. As you cross the canal, on your right is the rear portion of the *Suffolk Millyard* (99). The gabled building at the far end is a boarding house block of about 1831 that was converted for industrial use.

On the left, facing Perkins Street, is the *Lawrence Manufacturing Company's Agent's House* (1830) (13). Agents were the executives responsible for the day to day administration of the mills. This house is occupied now by the *Lowell Day Nursery* (1889), originally established by the Lowell mills to aid working mothers.

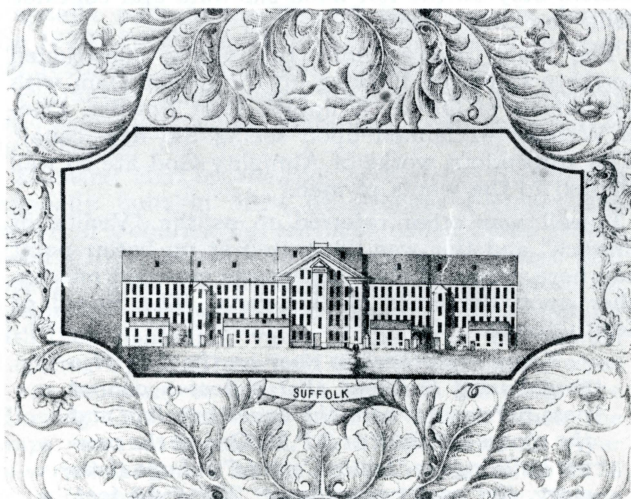
Continue on Cabot Street. The parking lots on either side of you were occupied by the boarding houses of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company.

The Lawrence Mills were founded in 1830 and are the last remaining of the original twelve corporations still in Lowell.

Turn right onto Perkins Street.

Parallel to Perkins Street, and partially covered by mills, is the *Lawrence Canal*. Built in 1831, it is 1400 feet long, and directs water from the Western Canal into the Lawrence Yard.

The small house-like structure on your left, across the canal, is the *Counting House*, built in the 1880's



to replace an earlier one. The Counting House was the administrative offices of the mills and this was the only public entrance into the yard.

Turn right onto Suffolk Street.

On your left is the site of the *Tremont Manufacturing Company* (1831). The mills were carefully razed for salvage in the 1930's when the company closed. In 1871 the Tremont was merged with the *Suffolk Mills* (1831) located on the right.

The Suffolk Yard was rebuilt in 1863 when the mills closed during the Civil War. This created such panic among corporations that Charles Cowley noted:

During the late war, . . . the Merrimack Company showed great "lack of sagacity and forethought" — in stopping their mills — in dismissing their operatives — in discontinuing the purchase of cotton and in selling their fabrics at a slight advance on their peace prices and at less than the actual cost of similar fabrics at the time of sale. Had they not committed this stupendous blunder, they might have realized many millions of dollars during the War. But instead of boldly running, as companies elsewhere did, they took counsel of their fears and their spacious mills stood (empty).

The blunders of this company, were naturally copied by others — the younger companies being accustomed to "dress" on the Merrimack . . .

The long low structure is the original Counting House of 1831. The Yard now houses an operating textile concern and the *Lowell Museum*.

Further along, on your left is the *Tremont Gatehouse* (1855), which regulates the unique flow of water on this end of the Western Canal. At this point, the canal is actually on two levels. Water powered both the Tremont and Suffolk Yards, and re-entered the canal to power the Lawrence Yard. Additional water could be directed to the Lawrence Yard on a different level, bypassing the Suffolk and Tremont. The Gatehouse was built as part of the Northern Canal Project (1848-1849) in the Romanesque style.

Cross French Street and continue along the bank of the Western Canal, turn left onto Merrimack Street and return to the Merrimack Canal Gatehouse.

Notes

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LOWELL